Epi wafer market looking good

I There can be little doubt that there is great optimism in the future for the production of epi wafers at the moment. The news pages of this issue of *III-Vs Review* bear testimony to the hive of activity currently occurring in this sector of the industry, telling tales of expansions, new entrants and much more besides.

The confidence in the growing demand for epi wafers is clearly seen in the formation of Epitaxial Technologies LLC, a start-up company based in Baltimore, Maryland, USA, which plans to target wireless and optoelectronic telecommunications applications using molecular beam epitaxy (MBE). The company plans to have three MBE systems in operation when its initial, multi-million dollar investment phase is completed towards the end of next year.

It is also seen in the announcement from Epitaxial Products International (EPI) that it is to more than double the production capacity at its plant in Cardiff, UK, with the installation of an additional eight metal organic chemical vapour deposition (MOCVD) systems. EPI's expansion is aimed to meet the growing demand for high brightness LED, solar cell, HBT and pHEMT applications. Furthermore, EPI anticipates opening a production facility in North America in the near future and has already boosted its sales and support presence in the region.

Another trend in the market, however, is also evident in this month's news and that is the direct, commercial involvement of equipment vendors in the production of epi wafers. EMCORE, the US-based MOCVD equipment maker, has stepped up its epitaxial foundry services in both its E2M and Pegasus divisions. The company says that it is seeing a definite increase in interest for foundry services in both divisions, especially from its existing equipment customers. Similarly, the French MBE specialist, Riber, is now using its application laboratory in Paris for the production of merchant epilayers for equipment customers. Roy Szweda considers the reasons, as well as some of the implications, of this greater involvement of equipment producers in *Crystal Gazing* this month. Obviously, there is plenty to think about!

While there remain plenty of questions to be asked and answered, one thing that all this activity does make clear is that there is a good market, and good margins, for the production of epi wafers. That is sure to be welcome news for everybody.

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